

ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

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GERMANY

Bishops in DDR Attacked by the State

Tension between church and state in East Germany continues to mount following the reading of a letter from all Protestant pulpits on October 13. The letter, prepared by Protestant bishops in the German Democratic Republic, strongly criticised the attempt of communist party secretary Walter Ulbricht to associate all organs of state in East Germany with the drive to enlist young people for the communist-sponsored youth dedication ceremonies planned to be held again next spring (see EPS No. 38).

The letter underlined the fact that state sponsorship of the ceremonies violated assurances given by the East German government in 1956 that they would be entirely voluntary and independent of state control. The bishops declared that boys and girls leaving school must decide between the secular ceremony and confirmation. They stressed that any combination of the two alternatives was unthinkable.

A sharp reaction to the reading of the letter came from East German Home Affairs minister Karl Maron. In a counter letter addressed to the bishops, the minister referred to the launching of the USSR's satellite and described the ceremonies as a means of promoting "scientific education". He said that "the position of science and technics today raises many burning questions to which our young people, irrespective of their philosophy of life, demand an answer". He claimed that the answer could be given only from the point of view of science.

Maron's letter goes on to charge the bishops' message with containing "calumnies against our state and provocative distortions of the situation in the German Democratic Republic". He describes the bishops as forbidden to have dealings with the western "fascist forces... which have already taken possession of all the key positions in state, industry and the NATO army, and which, as usual, enjoy the support of many of the leaders of the Evangelical Church". Although the bishops' letter has not been made public in the west, Maron took exception

to its alleged publication outside East Germany, where, he said, it would be the object of accusations against "the workers' and peasants' government". He attacked comparison of the communist-sponsored youth dedications with dedication ceremonies conducted by the Nazis.

E.P.S., Geneva

ITALYRoman Catholic Laity Urged to Cooperate with Non-Catholics

The Pope told over 2,000 delegates from more than 80 countries attending the Second World Congress on the Lay Apostolate held at Rome from October 5 to 13 that Roman Catholic laity should "cooperate with neutral and non-Catholic organisations if and in so far as by so doing they serve the common good and God's cause".

His advice to the congress, which took "The Laity in the Crisis of the Modern World" as theme, was followed by an appeal for "more participation in international organisations", which the Pope described as "addressed to all, but particularly to technically qualified agriculturalists".

Earlier in the same speech Pope Pius had warned against what he called four mortal dangers threatening the Church in Latin America: "the invasion of Protestant sects, secularisation of the whole of life, Marxism springing up as the most active element in the universities and controlling almost all the workers' organisations, and finally, a disturbing form of spiritualism".

References were made during the sessions to problems of Christian unity and cooperation. In preparatory work, some of the studies of the World Council of Churches on the laity were used and the message of the WCC's 1954 Evanston Assembly was quoted.

Dr. Marga A. Klompe, Minister for Social Welfare in the Dutch Government, spoke on "The Responsibility of the Laity in Europe". She described the division within Christianity as a special sphere for exercising this responsibility, and said that many Asians and Africans regard Europe as being the manifestation of Christendom. Christians in Europe had much in common, even if they were divided about essentials. "They are struggling today for the dignity of man, and by uniting in this struggle they can learn from one another in mutual respect."

"The fact that Christians are divided", continued Dr. Klompe, "instead of forming a unity as Christ wished them to do, must give us cause for constant concern and disquiet. It is therefore a grave responsibility to start and maintain ecumenical discussion between Christians in Europe, where this division first arose."

A working paper from Belgium, presented to a special workshop on unity, said that "Christian division is certainly the greatest scandal and the biggest obstacle confronting our task of evangelism". Declaring that Christian disunity was particularly distressing to the laity because they are constantly in touch with non-Catholics and in a position to "get rid of the psychological factors causing Christian division", the Belgian report went on to list "silence and inaction, indifferentism and excessive proselytism" as perils involved in witnessing to non-Catholics.

Referring to the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity held each January, the document said that prayer for unity must be intensified, but people "must not rest content with this week alone".

Urging closer study of Catholic doctrine and the "faith and usage of non-Catholics", the report says "the more one discovers the faith of others the more one must deepen one's own faith, otherwise a dangerous imbalance can develop. Our separated brethren can be a means whereby we discover values that belong to the Church's treasure, but have been somewhat neglected by us."

The Belgian paper closes with concrete suggestions for introducing the study of problems of Christian unity into catechisms, school lessons, family life, parish life, cooperation with existing centres for contact and study, and the use of press, films, sound recordings and radio.

E.P.S., Geneva

FRANCE

Protestant Assembly Sees Prospects of Reunion

Discussing the conclusions of an ecumenical study assembly called by the French Protestant Federation at Bièvres during the second week of October, Professor Jean Bosc of the Reformed Theological Faculty in Paris writes in the Paris paper "Réforme" that there exists in France "a sufficient doctrinal consensus" and a "sufficient fellowship (particularly with the establishment of intercommunion) for a possibility of reunion of the French Protestant churches to be envisaged".

Professor Bosc goes on to describe the existing youth, missionary and institutional work now done together by Lutherans and Reformed, and asks whether this is not a "sign that they can live together in a common faith". He asks whether the total mission and responsibility of the evangelical churches in France does not imply a form of church order addressed to the whole French people and calling them into a united body.

According to M. Bosc, the study assembly "clearly and unanimously expressed what it believed should be the long-range prospect given to the Lutheran and Reformed churches", and described it as "the constitution of a united evangelical church in France, without being, it is hardly worth underlining, an absorption of one confession by another, but a true reunion".

The assembly of about 75 pastors and laymen asked the leaders of the French Protestant churches to take the first steps in this direction. It was called under the auspices of the French Ecumenical Study Commission, established in 1955 with Professor Roger Mehl of Strasbourg as chairman, and was widely representative of the official leadership of French Protestantism.

Major themes for study during the assembly were "The Responsibilities of the Protestant Churches for European Unity" and "What Does the Common Membership of our Reformed and Lutheran Churches in the World Council Mean?"

The World Council of Churches was represented at the meeting by Dr. Madeleine Barot, executive secretary of its Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society, and by the Rev. Paul Abrecht, executive secretary of the Department on Church and Society within the Division of Studies. E.P.S., Geneva

Youth Leaders Hold Annual Consultation

(Hamburg) - Fifty youth leaders from fourteen European countries met from October 7-14 in Hamburg for the eleventh annual European consultation, to consider the work of the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches, review ecumenical youth projects, and make plans for a European youth conference set for the summer of 1959.

The representatives of ecumenical youth councils heard a review of the first ten years' work of the Youth Department and a discussion of its future by its retiring executive secretary, the Rev. Bengt-Thure Molander.

Looking at the future of ecumenical youth work, Mr. Molander listed five tasks: increased cooperation between world youth groups; development of regional concerns for youth work; finding additional ways of involving young people in the organisation of the church; finding new ways youth can help in the ecumenical movement; working out new relations with world-wide confessional groups.

Other speakers included the Rev. Keith Bridston, new executive secretary of the WCC's Department of Faith and Order, the Rev. Francis House, associate general secretary of the WCC, the Rev. Andrew Wright, associate general secretary of the World Council of Christian Education and Sunday School Association, and the Rev. H. Schmidt, student pastor at Tübingen University, who led the Bible studies.

More than 1,500 participants are expected to attend a conference for European church youth, scheduled for Lausanne, Switzerland, in the summer of 1959, it was announced at the consultation. Planned for 15 to 30 year olds, the programme will include Bible study, group discussions, drama, a mass meeting and visits to local churches.

E.P.S., Geneva

SPAIN

Forty Protestant Families Struck by Flood

More than forty Protestant families were among the thousands who lost all their possessions when floods struck Valencia, Spain, on October 12-13.

After an investigation on the spot by a World Council of Churches representative, the several Protestant communities formed a temporary relief committee to aid the stricken families. The WCC's Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees has sent word of the disaster to churches in countries with traditionally close ties to Spanish Protestantism, and will make aid available to the disaster victims.

E.P.S., Geneva

ITALY

Protestant Youth From Latin Countries Meets

Late last month thirty-three youths from eight countries took part in a conference in Sicily sponsored by the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches for young people in Latin countries. The programme, the third of its kind, is designed to give youth from countries where their Protestant church is in the minority a chance to discuss common problems and realise that they are not isolated.

During the first week of the conference, delegates visited Protestant parishes throughout Sicily, then went to Palermo for a week of Bible study, led by Professor Pierre Bonnard of the Theological Faculty of Lausanne, Switzerland.

Youth from France and Algeria, Italy, Argentina, Portugal, Spain, Brazil and the French-speaking section of Switzerland took part. In addition, three students from the United States were present.

E.P.S., Geneva

YUGOSLAVIAReformed Bishop on Atomic Weapons in the Light of the Bible

Bishop Agoston of the Reformed Church in Yugoslavia has cited the Bible as casting new light on problems raised by the use of atomic weapons. He agrees that the Church should condemn all lethal weapons, but questions whether the Bible regards the destruction of the world as deplorable.

"Why should God not bring about the end of the world through man himself?" the Bishop asks, quoting II Peter 3:10: "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Declaring that this would happen irrespective of men's wishes or protests, Bishop Agoston said the Church should not rest content with protests, but warn people, in the words of II Peter 3:11-14 "to be in all holy conversation and godliness" and say "we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness".

E.P.S., Geneva

GERMANYWomen of Reformed Churches Seek Clarification of Status

(Detmold) - The Committee for Women's Work of the Reformed (Presbyterian) churches in Germany has sent representatives for the first time to the recent all-German meeting of Reformed leaders. They asked the meeting to appoint a theologian to define the status of women in the congregation and urged that governing bodies of the congregations in Germany should appoint more women to their membership.

The women's representatives said it was important to appoint more than one woman to the governing body of the local congregation because "one woman would hardly venture to raise her voice in an exclusively masculine group". They asked pastors' conferences to deal more intensively with women's questions and to study the transformation of the status of women in public life.

The council of Reformed leaders, under the chairmanship of Dr. Wilhelm Niesel, sent a letter to the pastors and elders of the Hungarian Reformed Church, stressing the importance of having a spiritually independent leadership in dealings between church and state.

The major churches represented in the German Alliance of Reformed Churches are in Northwest Germany and the province of Lippe. Most other Reformed churches in Germany are also members.

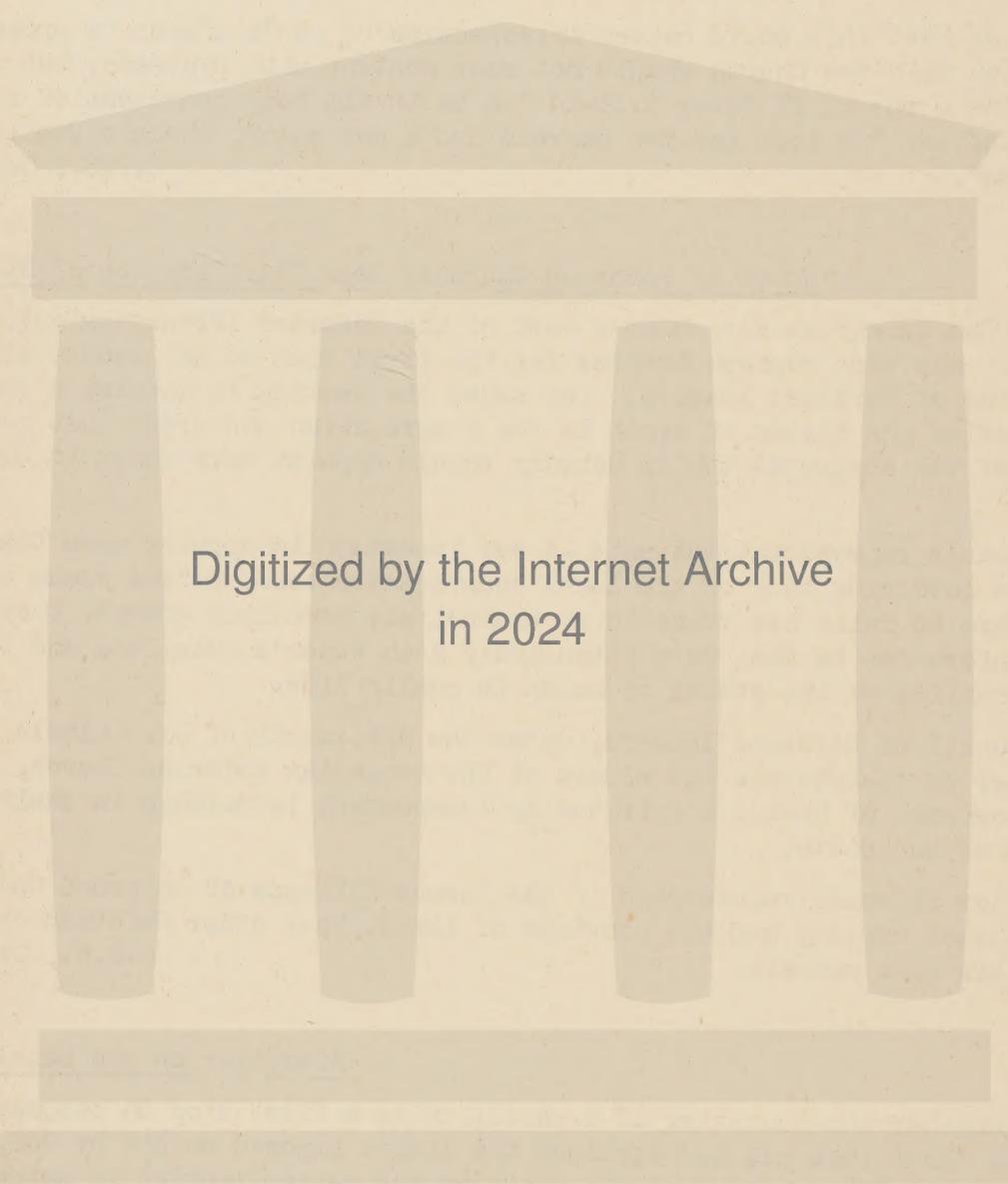
E.P.S., Geneva

GERMANYNiemöller on the Satellite

Asked whether the launching of a satellite as a first step to conquering the universe meant that man had exceeded the limits imposed on him by God, Pastor Martin Niemöller said that the question was better applied to weapons of mass destruction than to the so-called satellites. He said God had imposed limits on man by making love the fulfilment of the law. "Everything that is contrary to love of God and of one's neighbour exceeds the limits", he declared.

In reply to a further question asking whether the new situation created by the satellite imposed special tasks on the evangelical church, Martin Niemöller replied that the Church had only one task; to arouse the conscience of mankind, for whom God sent His Son so as to reconcile men with Himself and with one another.

E.P.S., Geneva



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UNITED STATESGeneral Board Adopts Report on Arab Refugees

(New York) - The General Board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. has called for more generous church support to the United Nations' Relief and Works Agency and to Church World Service to help solve the plight of the nearly one million Arab refugees from Palestine.

The action, taken at the General Board's meeting this month, came after the committee heard a report which stated that "the root cause of the Middle East crisis is the plight of the Arab refugees. Until their fate is settled, no solution to the Middle East crisis is possible." The committee also asked for consideration of ways through which personal relations can be established between the peoples of the Middle East and the United States.

In other action, the board urged full church support for United Nations efforts to restore freedom and peace in Hungary, called for regularising the status of Hungarian "parolee" refugees in the United States who are subject to deportation without hearings or rights of appeal, commended President Eisenhower for upholding U.S. court decisions on desegregation and taking steps to restore law and order in Little Rock (see EPS No. 38) and praised churches and individuals for strongly supporting interracial "justice along with reconciliation, for law along with self-discipline".

E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

The Rev. Melbourn Evans Aubrey, 72, the general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland from 1935 to 1951 and a former member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, has died in England. Mr. Aubrey had also been moderator of the Federal Free Church Council, president of the Baptist Union, vice-president of the British Council of Churches, and a member of the committee which drafted the constitution of the World Council of Churches.

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Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hanover, until recently president of the Lutheran World Federation, has been presented by Professor Theodor Heuss, President of the German Federal Republic, with the Cross of Merit - the highest honour which he can confer. Dr. Lilje received this distinction "in recognition of his outstanding services in reconstructing church life in Germany, and for his active participation in the ecumenical movement, especially in the world-wide Lutheran church".

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At the suggestion of the Ecumenical Council for Haarlem, west of Amsterdam, an ecumenical study centre and library have been opened to collect and disseminate publications of the World Council of Churches. During the winter months a course will be organised on "Being a Christian in One's Own Church and in the One Church of Christ".

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The largest Lutheran church in Poland, the church of the Trinity, in Warsaw, is to be re-dedicated on May 18, 1958. The government restored the building to the Lutheran Church a year ago (see EPS No. 34, 1956). Meanwhile the building has been renovated. The re-dedication will be combined with an "ecumenical day" attended by church representatives from other countries.

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Southern Baptist missionaries in Nigeria have asked President W.R. White and the trustees of Baptist-sponsored Baylor University in Waco, Texas, to take more positive steps toward backing integration. Commented President White: "It is a subject that is the trustees' responsibility and I would not undertake any action on it until they requested it."

* *

An Australian Evangelical Alliance has been formed by clergy and laymen of various denominations with the Most Rev. H.W.K. Mowll, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney and Primate of Australia, as president. Aim of the alliance will be to encourage evangelism and "unite all evangelical Christians in the spreading of the Gospel". The group will also prepare for the proposed 1959 Billy Graham crusade in Australia. The alliance will affiliate with the World Evangelical Fellowship which has member organisations in 27 countries.

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According to the "Hungarian Church Press", 5,000 school children have applied for Protestant religious instruction in Budapest as against 800 last year. The instruction is given twice a week by a full-time and 23 part-time teachers between noon and 2 p.m. or 4 p.m. and 6.p.m.

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Bishop Zoltan Turoczy (of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary) has spent several weeks in Finland as guest of the Finnish Church. He met the bishops and preached in Finnish churches. At the same time Hungarian churches were visited by a Finnish and a Danish pastor.

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"Békehírnök", the paper of the Baptist Church in Hungary, has resumed publication twice a month. The paper was founded in 1895 and appeared without interruption until 1944. It is edited by Laszlo Szabo, president of the Hungarian Baptist Churches.

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Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin was to have attended the 125th anniversary celebrations of the Gustavus Adolphus Association at Leipzig in the German Democratic Republic, in November. Following an announcement by the East German government that Bishop Dibelius would not be permitted to travel to Leipzig, the celebrations were cancelled. Instead there will be general intercessions in the congregations for the association's work among Protestants living in non-Protestant areas. The Gustavus Adolphus Association is named after the Swedish king who came to the help of central European Protestants during the Thirty Years' War.

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A "Kirchentag movement" is developing in the Netherlands. Preparations for 24 regional mass meetings are in hand. A poster will be displayed all over the country and preliminary steps to be taken this winter include literature distribution and formation of study groups in the congregations. The general slogan "God With Us" will be related to the celebration of the great festivals of the Church year.

E.P.S., Geneva

The International Review of Missions

In the October International Review of Missions Dr. W. Freytag, the German missionary leader, describes his recent visit to the Chinese People's Republic. Other 'young churches' are represented in the issue. Pastor G. Preiss, of France, writes of The Church in Tahiti, out of experience in the congregations there. A discussion of Protestant Theological Education in Japan, by Dr. Hidenobu Kuwada, president of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, describes Japanese reactions to western theologians, such as Karl Barth, and the thinking and writing of Japanese Christians. Dr. W.H.H. Norman gives an account of Non-Church Christianity in Japan. Dr. Wilhelm Andersen, of Germany, concludes the 'missiology' debate which has run through recent issues of the Review with his study of Dr. Kraemer's Contribution to the Understanding of the Nature of Revelation; the Rev. Eric S. Gabe further interprets Jewish life and thought in Atonement in Judaism and the Missionary Approach; Dr. J.M. Van der Linde surveys five hundred years of The Moravian Church in the World; Mr. John S. Andrews, of Leeds, surveys Missionary and Allied Material in the Romany Collection of the University of Leeds to trace concern for missions to gypsies.

International Missionary Council notes contain a tribute to the late Ernest J. Bingle, and an account of the Caribbean Consultation which took place in the course of the summer.

The Book Review section discusses Roman Catholic books on missionary history and missionary thinking. Other reviews include one of Jean Guiart's study of Culture Contact in the New Hebrides and others on R.A. Hodgkin's Education and Change, R.N. Bellah's Tokugawa Religion and Dr. Edwin Smith's new book on Roger Price of Bechuanaland.

E.P.S., Geneva

The Ecumenical Review

The October issue of the World Council of Churches quarterly opens with two articles on the problems of Christian communication: Klaus von Bismarck of Germany writes on The Christian Vocabulary and Jean-Marc Chappuis of Switzerland on The Dialogue between Church and Press. Three speeches delivered at New Haven, in the United States, in connection with the WCC's 1957 Central Committee meeting, follow: H. Berkhof of Holland and J. Russell Chandran of India introduce the main theme of the meeting, The Church's Calling to Witness and to Serve, and Rena Karefa-Smart of Sierra Leone describes how Africa Asks Questions of the West. The series of meetings at New Haven are presented through documents and commentary in the Chronicle and Diary. There are book reviews on Church Law, Apostolic Succession, The Last Things, Russian Messianism and notices of important publications.

E.P.S., Geneva

